

Old fir has rich history, rotten core

On the eastern outskirts of Washougal stands an ancient and scraggly fir tree known to many area residents as the Witness Tree.

The tree is located on the property of Mr. and Mrs. James Patterson, 101 39th St., Washougal. In the early days of Washougal the tree was used as a property line marker. It had an official purpose, also. As settlers passed the tree, a tradition of carving their names on it evolved.

The tree no longer stands on the property line and there is no trace of settlers carving their names.

Age, insects, and disease have caught up with the landmark. It has a distinct lean to the north and much of its trunk is exposed by broken branches. It might not be around much longer, because near the base one can see it is rotting on the inside.

Patterson speculated it is rotten most of the way up the approximately 120-footer.

"The PUD was thinking about cutting it down,

because it might break their lines if it fell," said Mrs. Patterson. "They said they didn't want to do it unless they really had to."

Mrs. Patterson said she had had a piece of bark from the tree that looked like it had some names carved in it. The bark was lost when the couple's home burned to the ground six years ago.

The Pattersons said that they were told by a former Washougal barber, Nels Gary, now deceased, that Washougal's first school was located on their property.

They said Gary told them the large oak tree standing beside the Witness Tree was in the school yard where he and his brother attended classes.

The more common theory is that Washougal's first school was near Parker's Landing.

Even if the Witness Tree is cut down, it might still have a purpose. The Pattersons said the Columbia River Cultural Center once contacted them about using



A LANDMARK dies a slow death in Washougal. Mr. and Mrs. James Patterson, 101 39th St., point to the rotting base of the witness tree which grows on their property.

the wood from the tree to make benches for a museum. The area near the

Patterson home is one site being considered for the location of the museum.



THE WITNESS TREE
... aging Washougal landmark